

# Life of the Spirit

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## LAY OR RELIGIOUS?

BY

THE EDITOR



OUR treatment of the question of lay contemplatives in the August issue of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* raised an interest which was not surprising in view of the numbers who are seeking some form of dedicated life in the world. In particular the letters to the Editor (only one of which was short enough for publication!) showed a considerable diversity of opinion on the nature of the constitution of a society of lay contemplatives. This divergence of opinion often seemed to rest on a lack of understanding of the distinction between religious and lay life. One writer suggests a new religious order, which would be 'a band of secret contemplatives and their lives would be entirely dedicated and quite informal'. The rules suggested include 2 hours a day the minimum for prayer; a solitary life; the member should be able to pray at night 'if so inclined'; he should be self-supporting—'no habit, no vows, no constitutions . . . no admission or demission'. 'The member would simply settle down in a place and try to convert it by prayer. His active work being merely the outward expression of his prayer.' Each individual would have simple direction from a 'Director'.

The advantages suggested in such a society are that having 'no vows to break and no community to scandalise' the individuals would need little training except simply by attaching themselves at will to a teacher whom they would follow in the same way as the Indians gather in groups consisting of a teacher and his disciples. The authority would thus not be absorbed by one single individual. Again the lay worker being master of his own day can organise more time for prayer than is provided for the members of active religious orders. 'Moreover the pressure of the common life, although it is the great school of charity, almost eliminates that physical solitude and silence which greatly help towards contemplative prayer.' 'What is needed is not a new institute but a revival of the old profession of hermit or solitary within the context of modern life.'

All this suggests that the ideal of a group of lay contemplatives will simply turn out to be an enthusiasm of several lay people for the contemplative ideal of the Christian life. An individual who is on his own and can live thus solitary is bound to aim at some kind of contemplation if it is true that the Christian life is fundamentally a contemplative life. A Christian is bound to give some time to prayer when his job allows it, and he is bound to be hospitable and apostolic as the writer also suggests. There is no description here of anything other than a general call to prayer addressed to all well disposed Christians, and there is no property whatever on which to base the idea of an order. The idea as stated is not that of a religious order at all; the writer is considering not religious but lay life.

But the description of this type of lay Christian life in contrast to modern religious orders shows a lack of understanding of the nature of religious life. Unless this confusion is dispelled the aims of 'secular institutes' will be entirely misconstrued and their possibilities for the sanctification of their members and those for whom they work will be lost. The ideals of a 'secular institute' are to set up a religious order in the very heart of secular life; hence it is to be contra-distinguished from the lay life however sanctified and holy the latter may be. A religious order is constituted principally by the vow of obedience, which involves the member in a system, a way of life, in which he would not otherwise be involved. The vow subordinates him to superiors and correlates him to fellow members, and from this subordination and 'ordination' springs the Order—or Congregation—or Institute. An organisation of some sort is essential to the idea of the religious state, and it is precisely this static element from which the nature of the 'State of Perfection' is derived. The Gospel of our Lord of itself provides the royal way of perfection, to which no other constitution or set of rules need be added in order to lead the soul to the height of supernatural love—which is synonymous with Christian 'perfection'. But embraced by that way are many tracks which may be followed by the individual according to his vocation. One may follow the track of the priesthood, two more may choose that of married life to which our Lord gave the special means of a sacrament. And the track of religious life is one which is specially dedicated by the vow and the added rules and constitutions. The Church has from the beginning recommended this 'state' as being a very direct path to perfection; but no guarantee is attached to it, so that the secular priest or the family man may very well attain more rapidly to a higher grade of the love of God.



The vow which subordinates the member to the organisation in fact turns all his actions into acts of religious worship, because the vow is itself an act of the virtue of religion and so far as it is brought to bear on life as a whole it brings this new quality to the component parts of that life. In the middle ages laymen used publicly to dedicate themselves to a pilgrimage or even to a crusade, and to that extent and for the period promised the good actions which followed took on a new character from this promise. The religious by vow adds this quality to his life, that is why he is called a 'religious', since the all-embracing vow is an act of the virtue of religion. The exact articulation of the organisation to which he has committed himself depends on the individual 'Order' and upon the general guidance of Mother Church. Sometimes it may become dangerously overweighted with meticulous and detailed rules and injunctions, at other times it may threaten to cease being an organisation through lack of a determining rule; but within those two extremes lie almost infinite possibilities of ordering life in religious service. There are the strictly enclosed contemplatives whose service is specially directed to the service of silent prayer or of liturgical prayer; others are embraced by rules suited to a service of God in works of mercy, in teaching, or in missionary work. The common life entailed by these rules and constitutions is very varied; sometimes they leave a great deal of solitude as with the Cistercian despite his intensely social life, or with the Carthusian in his isolated cell; sometimes almost every moment of the day is shared with others. This common life may incidentally bring with it a considerable amount of comfort and freedom from worldly worries which face the good lay Christian. It may on the other hand provide a great deal of stress and tension. But these are not the aims of the common life, which is directed quite simply to the perfection of religious service, growing up into love. The common life of such religious rules brings into play all the Christian social virtues of 'affability', gratitude, liberality, truth-telling and above all that of fraternal charity. And in the ages when the Church knew and encouraged hermits and anchorites, it was generally understood that they had first perfected themselves in some such way of religious service so that they would not be looking for a way of escape or of self-centred devotion in those various districts of the Christian desert. As a rule the solitaries remained attached to some form of religious organisation by their vows—in fact it must have been an application of the vow of obedience which permitted a woman like Mother Julian to leave her Benedictine Abbey and take up her position in the little cell outside her church in Norwich. In these days the Carmelite life still admits and encourages its

hermits within its enclosure walls.

The Secular Institutes which have grown up in modern times have been attempts to reap the advantages of this religious service while remaining in more immediate contact with modern secular life. This necessarily demanded the abandonment of a considerable number of the traditional rules of the religious organisations hitherto recognised—the religious habit is an obvious example. But it could not envisage the forsaking of the principles of vow and constitution which lie at the foundation of religious life. The secular institutes are in fact attempts to re-apply those very fundamental principles. Those who have recently been endeavouring to apply them within a contemplative framework have not abandoned this general aim—indeed if they did they would be simply considering the best way for a layman to attain to the Contemplative ideal of the Christian life. But that is not the quest. Every individual Christian must indeed seek that for himself. But should he wish to be supported by vow and some form of common life, without entering a cloister of brick or stone, should he wish to belong to a religious organisation whose rule would direct his every movement towards the religious service of private prayer, without his having to don a special garment or live the intensely social life of the Cistercian Abbey, he must set about the elaboration of a constitution which will receive the approbation of the Church and thus with the sanction of authority place him in the state of perfection.

There are other devout Catholics who find themselves with a certain amount of time to spare from their daily work and who have no special social ties which bind them to family or relatives; such men and women are to be encouraged from every pulpit and from every director's confessional to undertake the contemplative life seriously. On occasion such people may be even advised to adopt some form of eremitical life—but if it involves the continuation of a life of work among their fellow human beings it will be only a metaphorically eremitical life, because the practice of the social virtues in their work will be one of their principal occupations. Nevertheless all these individual vocations to a life of prayer are glorious signs of the presence of the Spirit dwelling in his Church leading chosen souls to perfection according to his own unpredictable breathings. No one should dare to scorn these vocations or to regard them as being merely the manifestation of envy arising in the hearts of those who have been unable to live the constituted religious life. Constituted religious life is not for all, particularly perhaps in these days. But it still remains of great importance to realise the distinction between religious and lay life. False comparisons arising from a misconception of the nature of religious life will only lead



to foolish rivalry. In the house of God there are many mansions and each has its own ground plan, different in design from all the others.


In conclusion an extract from another letter about the August Editorial will help to clarify the nature of this contemplative life in the world: 'The story of St Jane Frances de Chantal seems rather relevant—"When Madame had M. de X as her director she prayed for two hours a day and upset the whole house. Since she has had M. de Genève she prays all day and upsets no one." . . . Contemplation is a matter of the kind of prayer not the amount of time one gives to it; and if the right thing is achieved the time question will solve itself. Would it not help if we concentrated on that interior discipline of mind and will which must be there before the Holy Ghost can take over?'

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## PAROCHIAL SPIRITUALITY

BY

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.

HE parish church is the place of God's meeting with his children. God's house is the Christian's home, and home is the place to which you return.

The life of grace is for the members of Christ a common life, whose redemptive source is one, whose end is one.

Its unity is symbolised by, indeed is effected on, that altar-stone of sacrifice which gives to the church its meaning and reveals to the people of God their destiny.

Within the single circle of Christian life there are infinite varieties of Christian living. Each soul unique: but for all alike the need and fact of redemption, of incorporation in Christ the Lord of all. The irony is that the life of the Spirit, which is primarily the common life of unity, of being made one with and through Christ our Lord, should so largely be considered in terms of individual perfection. Degrees of sanctity there most certainly are, and the heights are more exhilarating than the plains. But unity precedes diversity; the source from which St Teresa and Mrs Flaherty alike draw their strength is available to all.

But the economy of grace is achieved amongst men; thus are their wants supplied, their desires fulfilled. And the Incarnation reaches down to all that is human save sin. A man's natural need for meet-

ing, for finding a place and time in which to realise his incorporation in Christ, is given its supernatural answer. For the Church, the Mystical Body, is itself made incarnate in the world that is ours. The house of God is the Christian's home.

And here the significance of Baptism must be seen. The Sacrament of initiation is, properly, administered in the parish church in the presence of the people of God. A new member is engrafted into the Christian family, and it happens in the *ecclesia*, in the assembly gathered about the altar on which the sacrifice of Calvary is perpetuated. Whatever destiny may await the baptised one—whether it be marriage or a Carmelite call, martyrdom at the ends of the earth or an unnoticed lifetime within sight of the church—for everyone the source is here. A new name is recorded; a new life begins.

The spiritual life is inaugurated at that moment, and for the laity it is simply a parochial life. The overtones of special vocation, of particular graces, are grounded in the essential fact of this solemn incorporation in the Body of Christ, which looks indeed to its consummation in Heaven, but is achieved, here and now, in a local assembly, whether the church is that of Corinth or St Patrick's down the street.

'Spirituality for layfolk' is perhaps too often presented as something strange, certainly as something uneasily accommodated to the rhythm of parochial life. The reason is to be sought, one suspects, in the seminaries where 'Mystical and Ascetical Theology' is a special and secondary discipline—and the categories set out in Tanqueray's manual are certainly formidable. In other words, the spiritual life, in the technical sense, is supposed to be beyond the attainment of ordinary folk. For the members of sodalities there may be an occasional retreat—usually elsewhere; during a mission there will be a deeper understanding of the obligations of Catholic life. But one can scarcely wonder, granted the context of contemporary life, that a priest's preoccupations are with what is juridically essential. The 'spiritual life' of seminary recollection can bear little resemblance to the crowded life of Sunday masses, Saturday confessions, reclaiming the lapsed, catechising the children and keeping a precarious hold on finances. It is in any case no part of pastoral care to introduce people to obligations which they cannot be expected to fulfil.

What is needed, then, is a deeper understanding of the ordinary life of the parish as a means of sanctification, as well as a less academic approach to spirituality. The conditions for a deep spirituality are in fact given in the parochial cycle. The pity is that they are too rarely realised as such. Laymen (or, more often, laywomen) who are seeking to advance in prayer and the spiritual life are



tempted to contract out of the community to which they belong. It is a natural tendency, but a disastrous one when it impoverishes the common life into which all were incorporated at baptism.

No part of the *Encyclical Mediator Dei* is so impressive as that in which the Pope appeals for the proper integration of the objective and individual elements in Catholic life and worship. In the fully constituted parish they are both present because they are both necessary. Individual prayer finds a constant renewal in the corporate prayer of the community. And, conversely, the community at prayer looks to the extension of that life of divine union in all its members as individual persons, with gifts and graces separately given.

The spiritual life must be presented to the people of God as the normal fulfilment of Baptism and not as a minority occupation for the leisured and discerning. And the means for doing so are at hand in the Mass and the Sacraments. It is through a deeper realisation of the life of grace there made available that a true spirituality can be nourished. Methods of mental prayer, special mortifications, the recitation of the Divine Office, these for the laity are, as it were, ornaments in the margin of an essential text, and that text is the common life of all the baptised as realised in the parish.

Moreover the formation of a Catholic parish, conscious of its vocation as such, is the prerequisite for any missionary apostolate beyond its limits. The code of believing Christians, solid in faith, strong in hope and rooted in charity, a praying parish, shows the life of the spirit as already realised in the members of Christ.

What may this mean in practice? First of all the parish itself must be rediscovered as the Christian community, the people of God gathered together as a family with Christ our Lord for its head. Its unity is a reality which must be expressed, above all, in its prayer. The primacy in a parish belongs to the parish as such. Confraternities and guilds and legions are groupings which presuppose the society of the baptised. And it is in the administration of the sacrament of Baptism that a parish should find an eloquent expression of its unity. The sacrament publicly administered after the principal Mass, with its ceremonies explained and with all invited to participate, can be the most instructive reminder of what membership of the Church really means. It is, besides, an invitation to prayer, and one that rarely fails of its effect.

The Mass has its own pre-eminence, both as a sacrifice in which the parish fulfils its corporate mission, and as the model and inspiration of the individual prayer of Christians. Here, as in Baptism, an essential element in the Church's life must be seen as much more than a legal obligation. A 'parochial spirituality' will spring from a

deepened understanding of the Mass and the Sacraments as the means for achieving the divine union for which man was created. But they must be seen as mysteries in which the members of Christ are incorporated; in which, therefore, mind and voice and gesture are engaged.

The introduction of the Catholic laity to the spiritual life does not demand extraordinary innovations. Apart from the Mass and the Sacraments, the familiar forms of Catholic devotion have their share in this work of parochial sanctification. Too often liturgical services are presented with a grim finality which perturbs those unaccustomed to the Church's official types of worship. There is room for a sane adaptation here. The psalms of Compline, for instance, can become a real introduction to mental prayer if they are patiently explained, so that if need be the theme of a psalm can be summarised in English before it is actually sung. Popular forms of devotion, and especially the Rosary, have their own importance, and their familiarity make them especially valuable instruments to foster growth in holiness. Hence the importance of relating isolated acts of devotion—morning and evening prayers, the daily decade of the Rosary, the Angelus—to the corporate worship of the parish, centred in the church itself. Thus it is that the influence of the Sunday Mass can extend to odd moments of the week and the unity of the Mystical Body be resumed afresh.

There is no novelty in any of this, and it would be a work of supererogation to want to 'improve' on what the Church so abundantly provides. The point, perhaps, is to rediscover the ordinary life of the Church as an opportunity for growth in sanctity. And that means a fresh understanding of what a parish may become.

In our world and age it is easy to assume that traditional communities have ceased to have any validity. The anonymous life of large towns is not friendly to local loyalties, and even a rural environment has ceased to mean the stability of a society at one with itself. But the Christian community is not to be identified with any particular circumstances of time or place; in the last resort, what is true of Ballymena is true of Assisi and Seattle besides. And the only secure basis for the building up of the parish as an assembly of the people of God is simply its spirituality. No amount of organisation or activity can be a substitute for the divinely-bestowed unity of grace.

Where this sense of a responsible sharing in a divine work is active in a parish; where, that is, the people have been taught to pray, to use their hearts and voices, its effect does not end in the porch. Goodness asks to be communicated, and the unity realised at the altar must flow into the social life of the Christian family, whose



oneness in Christ so far transcends the divisions imposed by the business of daily living. Thus spirituality becomes not an optional extra, but the very spring and source of life itself.

This sense of a deepened responsibility of our adult awareness of the *unum necessarium* is achieved within the Church's ordinary framework. But it can be immensely stimulated by parochial retreats, themselves based on the traditional pattern of the Mass and the Sacraments. Such retreats, revealing the place of the sacramental principle at all levels of mortal life, from birth to death, in sickness and in health, are the best of all initiations to that total spiritual life to which Christians are committed in virtue of their baptism. As always, the Church provides the end—and the means for attaining it.

## DEVOTION FOR EVERY MAN

BY

C. J. WOOLLEN



CHRIST'S message, being for every man, is for the large body of unthinking as well as the more intellectual. In these days it must be admitted that the average man is not disposed to reason much; he prefers to accept mental fare that is given him without examining too closely its quality.

He does not necessarily accept the conclusions of others, but that is because he has not troubled to make judgments about them. His mental attitude is more that of one who is willing to be entertained as an observer at an intellectual feast, and with a pronounced respect for the dictum of the expert. There is a general mental laziness making for mass-passivity, which provides the grand opportunity for the demagogue and dictator.

The unresponsiveness of the man in the street to a message that demands mental exercise on his part has led us, in our campaign for the conversion of others to the Faith, to appeal more particularly to the intellectual. Our whole approach has been carried too far on to the intellectual plane. We tend to overlook that our real aim is to draw our fellow-countrymen into the life of the spirit, and we are inclined to waste energy in engaging in a battle of wits with the few disposed to argue. True, we always have at the back of our minds the intention to bring to those with whom we engage the solid gift of faith, but we seem not to have formed a technique for doing the work of conversion on a grand scale. If we have, in this country, forty million or more souls to convert,

will there be as many as forty thousand whom routine apologetic methods attract?

It might be thought, that in these days of wider educational opportunity there would be greater scope for the Catholic apologist. In some ways there is, and there is much work for him to do. The mistake is made if we expect to find a large body of philosophically minded ready to hear him. Modern educational methods tend to instil large doses of information rather than to make the pupil think. We have to remember, moreover, that, religious instruction being generally lacking or inadequate, the devotional habit of mind is not developed, so that anything 'religious' has to contend with prejudice from the start.

Yet the fact remains that we cannot instil devotion without first giving the soul a knowledge of God. It is necessary to know God before we can love him, as the catechism and sound psychology teach. The gibe against the Church that in the Middle Ages she laid store only by religious education is founded on ignorance of the actual educational facilities in the ages of Faith. But it does express a recognition of the insistence by the Church on the truth that education is truly first and foremost religious education.

The fact of the simplicity of most of the Church's children in all ages is empirical proof that there is no need for those who love God to be intellectual giants. In the words of Matt Talbot, the saintly Irish labourer, 'the kingdom of heaven was promised not to the sensible and the educated but to such as have the spirit of little children'. The nature of worship itself, moreover, shows that intense love of God can be founded on a small content of knowledge. Too often the school religious syllabus is represented as being a formidable affair, and there is some danger in emphasising the intellectual element in religious training as if it were the one thing necessary. Practice is founded on knowledge, but knowledge grows with practice. Love of God implies knowledge but to have knowledge is not necessarily to have love. To have in mind always that 'the greatest of these is charity' is to ensure the right emphasis in religious training.

It is certain that the majority, even of practising Catholics, are not theologians; nor can we expect that folk whom we aim at bringing into the Church should become any more so. The increasing number of people content to go through life without using their reasoning powers on things worth while makes conversion out of the question if the need for much theological knowledge is put in the forefront of our campaign. A non-Catholic old lady, who went daily to Mass and to every other public church service,



was said by a priest not to have the mental capacity to receive proper instruction. But he would have no hesitation in receiving her should she be in danger of death. Nevertheless it seems a pity that the good woman should be deprived of sacramental grace and the fuller life of the spirit if her dispositions justify it, even though her want of understanding results in her grasp of Catholic doctrine being weak.

The proverbial applewoman may have a kind of intuitive knowledge which she is unable to express in terms acceptable to the theologian. But, while we allow for this, we may not presume it. We do well to bear it in mind only that the proper proportion be kept between doctrinal and devotional instruction.

There is always difficulty in finding simple words in which to express profound truths. Theological accuracy must be observed, and when there is a departure from technical terms, the tendency is towards inaccuracy. Nevertheless, the theologian must learn to translate Catholic truth into language understood by the people. His greatest task will be to speak a tongue simple enough to be understood by the multitude of unbelievers who know hardly anything about God.

This calls for the gift almost of a *Curé d'Ars*, who could speak only little halting sentences that it would seem anyone could say; yet they had the power of moving hearts and bringing people to repentance. And the *Curé* himself confessed that he learned theology more at the *prie-dieu* than in the schools. But it is one thing to call to repentance those who believe in hell; another thing altogether to preach to those who have no clear idea of why they are alive. An effective approach to those whom we would convert seems almost to call for even greater gifts than the *Curé* possessed.

We gain, no doubt, in spiritual power if we remember that the implanting in the hearts of the love of God is the direct object of any apostolic work for conversion. The knowledge of Catholic truth imbibed by those to whom we teach it is unfruitful unless it issues in love and worship. An appeal to the intellect is useless unless its object be to touch the heart. It may be possible to instil instalments of knowledge the cumulative effect of which is to stir the will, but the ideal will be to encourage also habits of devotion that will lead the hearer to obtain the gift of conversion.

Immediate conversions are rare; the vision granted to St Paul, or the call to a Nathanael, are not of the kind that are often paralleled. And on a superficial view we may think that most conversions are the result of the convert having received some sort of instruction over a long time, and being convinced by arguments

continually repeated, or a course of private study. But in practice the Church assumes the desire for reconciliation as prior to intensive instruction. Whatever the knowledge of Catholic truth in the mind of the person seeking to be received, he or she is put under a course of instruction. The method by which people are treated to lectures on Catholic doctrine to stimulate their interest is in some sense a reversal of the official practice of the Church.

It would seem that the man in the street requires to be approached in a simpler way. The grace of God is prior to conversion, and prayer is prior to securing that grace. We must grant that a preliminary grace still is needed even that a man may pray. The approach to every man must include a strong spur to devotion.

How is this to be achieved? It may be that divine Providence will effect it by sending some great calamity. Famine may well send people to their knees to pray for the elementary need of food. During the war a Catholic prayer campaign made great progress in air-raid shelters. At Fatima tens of thousands prayed when they thought the end of the world was coming. In coal mine disasters people go down on their knees.

It has been thought that in times of calamity the simple exposition of the Passion of Christ may bring people to God and his Church. The sufferings of Christ, the God-Man, explain the sufferings of humanity. They are the link between a suffering people and God. 'We preach Christ crucified', said St Paul (1 Cor. 1, 23); to the Jews 'a stumbling-block', and to the Gentiles 'foolishness'. 'But unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.' That is to say, the prospective convert needs the grace of God that he may grasp the difference between the natural and the supernatural.

The most efficacious approach to the plain man will be one that finds simple methods of putting before him man's elevation above nature by grace. It may be done by explaining the mystery of human suffering. It will be advanced by exhortations to prayer. It may well involve promoting devotion to the Holy Ghost, whose 'kindly light' leads converts in their search for the true Faith. Certain it is that all who work for the conversion of our non-Catholic countrymen must themselves have such a devotion as to make others enthusiastic to share the life of grace which stamps them as ambassadors of the Love of God.



# HUMAN AND DIVINE LOVE

BY

MRS GEORGE NORMAN



HOLINESS on the heroic scale is sufficiently rare in itself, or so we believe; in conjunction with a profound and passionate love for a human being we believe it rarer still, almost a contradiction in terms. In our own times one whom, from the standpoint of our colder, more tepid lives, we may well consider a saint, has shown us the ways of sanctity, of active zeal so constant as to constitute heroism, and of human love, all united in a short life. This human and divine lover was Mario Chiri, one of the pioneers of Catholic Action which in Italy has produced an astounding crop of young men and young women of outstanding holiness; Mario Chiri is, humanly speaking, one of the most attractive of them.

Among the ways of Providence which may seem to our presumption least comprehensible is the early dying of men and women whose influence for good we feel has been abruptly extinguished. The simple answer is that death does not end influence; on the contrary it often extends it; the radiation, more or less restricted, may by death become world-wide. 'This is the power', says Fr G. Vann, O.P., in *The Divine Pity*, 'that lives on . . . the original influence is handed on to others and to others again and from generation to generation. . '

In the case of Mario Chiri, his influence in his own country was such that it might seem it could not have been greater, but this, of course, cannot have been so or all Italy would be now competing for canonisation. His letters to Lina Cusi, published a few years after his death, could probably not so have impressed his generation had he lived longer—their special point and appeal came from his being of the age of the young men and women who founded their married lives on the model he left them.

Mario Chiri was born on the 26th of October 1883; he died on the 16th of April 1915. 'To produce a Christian state', says the preface to his life by C. Parisi (A.E.V., Rome) 'was then the call to action to which Chiri so marvellously responded in his time'. 'Conditions made the goal seem very far off and the battle to reach it arduous'. Catholic Italy had gone widely astray owing to causes reaching back to the French encyclopedists, the German *Enlightenment* and the consequent growth of free-thought and freemasonry among the leaders, and other secret societies among the people. The faith was

not lost but its open practice in political and governmental circles was unusual and led too often along the road to failure or even dismissal.

Mario Chiri was born and grew up at Pavia, that northern 'city of a hundred towers'. Among the traditions and arts of such Italian churches and palaces his happy childhood and youth were passed. His father, an officer in the Piedmontese army, passed on to his son his integrity and valour but nothing of his robust physical appearance, for as he grew up it was evident that Mario was not growing very tall or anything but thin—a *magrolino*—and so he remained. His mother's was the formative influence; open-minded and intelligent, she taught her three sons from the very first to love their home, their country and, above all and everything, God. She loved her sons almost with passion but never indulged them; their home-life had all the Italian hardiness and was a little austere and they, in consequence, loved it and herself the more. The sons were intelligent; Mario at the age of five, for some domestic reason was sent to day-school and was seated apart on a little bench suited, in the teacher's opinion, to his tender age. An inspector, finding Mario's minute hand the only one raised to answer a question, had the little bench discarded, and Mario joined his elders. But this was a single episode, for otherwise he seems not to have distinguished himself till his University years except for clearness of mind and an ability to express it. But he had always a *will*, a horror of anything mean, shabby or impure and an adamant way of sticking to what he thought right; loose talk or sorry insinuations simply faded out, his fellows said later, when Mario was there. They liked him; one could *count* on Mario, and at school as later, and without any particular good looks, this *magrolino* had a charm no one could explain and few resist.

In due course Mario was entered at his city's University, a famous one founded as long ago as the 14th century by Galeazzo Visconti and where the dust of Columbus is said to rest.

In spite of his delicacy of appearance Mario was as sound of body as of mind, neither intensive study, games, mountain-climbing or the most strenuous fencing-bouts could tire him, he was joyous, open-hearted and apparently carefree, friendly with men and girl graduates alike. Yet to keen Italian wits there was something different about him from the first, something that set him apart, an inner reserve. He never preached—that was the last thing he thought of! yet somehow, in some way, they both said and wrote when he was dead, that they had felt *better* when with him. He was, too, original, made up of many strands; slightly romantic, his bent of mind was also intensely positive; he loved figures and statistics, but poetry at least



as well, for he knew most of the *Divine Comedy* by heart, much of Carducci and some of d'Annunzio. Music he loved with passion; he wanted to be a priest, or, at other times, a musical conductor. His religious ideals and—in that land of violent passion—the restraint and purity of his life were known, but he met with no spite or ridicule—his fellows found in him 'something pure, simple and infinitely great', and even with the most turbulent he was popular. As to the activities of those years, a full biography alone could relate them.

A first success at the Bar, followed by a tour of half Europe—a prize given by the University Catholic Federation—had confirmed the golden opinions he had already won. His former professor, G. Montemartini, then in the Ministry of Labour in Rome, had Mario nominated and attached to his department.

It is difficult, says G. Parisi, to measure what it might then have meant of valour for a young Catholic to take up such a post, 'how difficult but how thrilling' to join a bureaucracy which considered that it alone could deal with the working classes. Mario had fully formed opinions to the contrary, comprehensive views as to what constituted Christian justice and his own synthesis of the burdens it was to remove. For this he was abundantly equipped by his knowledge of sociology, economics and statistics; at that moment at Pavia his study of that city's commerce was appearing, and to this day is considered a mine of documentation and thought. Before long with other comprehensive reports he definitely established his reputation.

In Rome his Apostleship of Catholic Action took form and soon he was recognised by various Catholic bodies as the speaker they were looking for and was called upon in season and out; soon his activity verged on the miraculous. If he possessed a gift for oratory he made no use of it but relied on clarity and reasoning alone to convince his hearers. Unless actually asked to speak, however, he never put himself forward, yet while others might indulge in finer sentiments, it was found that it was he who *did* things. He gave Catholics, says his biographer, the arms which put them politically on a level with their adversaries.

It will be evident that this life of action was supernaturally sustained, for without prayer, daily Communion and his short meditation with their resultant grace Mario would not have retained his outstanding humility and the unfailing charity with which he met the jars and, sometimes, the jealousies and detraction incident to his work, or the cheerful serenity which nothing at any time really disturbed. Anyone as intelligent as Mario would have been aware of the natural powers he possessed for his apostleship and he obviously would wonder whether or not they were to be reinforced by the grace

of the priesthood. On the other hand he knew that he had, so to say, a natural aptitude for marriage, for human affection. He had once to use that iron will of his in order simply to disappear till he had conquered a wayward inclination. So, clear-sighted as he was, he was not going to try and rush into a seminary; he prayed, took advice and waited.

A summer holiday in an enchanted valley brought together his family and that of a charming girl of eighteen, Lina Cusi from Liscate; meeting daily, he and Lina made friends. When the time came for the idyll to end, 'They parted without precise words', says his biographer and friend, but after Mario's death it was found that he had carefully noted the date of that parting; while Lina Cusi has written elsewhere that 'a feeling stronger than themselves' (but not really stronger than Mario) 'had already pushed them towards each other'. They met afterwards at intervals, they even exchanged letters on occasions, they owned to each other their 'friendship', but still Mario went not an inch further. God had still to show him his will; to Lina as to himself he believed that Will was all that truly mattered. Most touchingly, most sublimely indeed, he thought Lina would feel precisely as he did that Eternity would unite them and that earth, when all was said, scarcely counted. . . . He never concealed from her that he would *have* to follow God's will—if only he knew it. Finally he went into retreat at the great monastery at Subiaco. Not long after another radiant summer united a circle of friends at Vezza d'Oglio and there, at long last, the 'friendship' he and Lina knew in their hearts was so much more, achieved its culmination to the delight of two families and many friends known and unknown. From all over Italy congratulations poured in on the champion of Catholic Action. He and Lina were married five months later, on the 8th January, 1912.

But till then there was the waiting. From the first Mario, of course, knew that Lina was good through and through; from the first he had talked quite openly to her of God, of holiness, of his desire to serve God, to save souls. She may have been all along, in some measure at least, of his way of thinking; certain it is that the engagement, or even the friendship, could not have lasted had she been fundamentally different from himself. She must indeed have shared his quality of *difference*, first of all to accept the long uncertainty, and then, when that ended, to accept Mario just as he was. True, she loved him, but that might only have exasperated her; most young girls at such a time expect the limelight to rest exclusively on themselves, to be the one and only thought of their lover, but with Mario that could not be. He contrived in the very first moments of



their engagement to write his Lina letters a confessor might almost have written; and neither to offend nor hurt her, nor even to make her think him a prig, his letters were of such crystalline sincerity and at the same time so much those of a lover. Lina was intelligent but it did not require intelligence to realise that he did *indeed* love her.

There was, then, as we might expect, something very fine in Lina Cusi, something loving and giving, a young yieldingness; apart from that, one guesses, there was something spiritual that matched that in Mario. In the very dawn of their engagement, which might more accurately be described as their impassioned love-story, he wrote to her, 'This morning a thought came to me with clearness, with force, with intensity—Lina too must go to Holy Communion every day. I had to write this to you (he uses the endearing and tender "tu" which in our colder phraseology we do not possess and which partly, I think, made such "confessor" letters possible) 'straight away . . . every day that passes is time wasted in which you miss one consolation, one help. . . . If he were still personally on earth, if he lived near you and you were allowed to go and see him once a day . . . could you give up hurrying every morning for a little to the beloved master, the beloved friend? . . . If, to give an example', he adds with that matter-of-fact candour of his, 'I were not far from you and you could come every day to spend an hour with me, would you refrain because, you might say, you feel me so greatly all day in you, near you?'

Before long, of course, with naïve sincerity, he discovered the demands affection such as theirs makes upon human beings. 'I really did not think that loving anyone so entirely absorbed one's thoughts! As the thought of our Lord is always present to me, so is the thought of you always present'. Soon, too, he was wondering what he had done to deserve this new and astounding happiness; his robust good sense and truthfulness told him and he told her: 'Well, . . . have I not tried in all the years of my youth to feed in my heart the pure love of God? Have I not absolutely trusted myself to God? Forbidding myself even to think of what my life might be, renouncing too, if necessary, human happiness? . . . To all this the good God (*Dio Buono*) has willed to give some merit'.

Another wonder of the engagement was that it never interfered with his zeal for Catholic Action, still less with his spiritual life, yet on the human side his tender and impassioned ardour never lessened. 'Keep as you are', he wrote, 'lovely, lovely indeed! It is a grace of God for which we must be serenely happy. . . . I want you absolutely

good as you are, as you will be; you are beautiful! Let's thank the Lord who has given you this gift as well, *mia bella, mia cara*'. The care he took to keep the same iron grip on himself as before was touching and wonderful. 'How I feel you always near. But . . . quietly, *bambina mia*, with the . . . well, nostalgia for caresses . . . no, that must not be. When we are together again that will be such a consolation to us. But, now absolutely peaceful (*serena*). . . And', he cannot help adding, 'I send you a kiss'.

All his letters have the simplicity of his race, the easy phrasing of matters more northern people will not, or cannot, express; with that simplicity he had the almost brutal Italian truthfulness. 'Do you know what I thought today? That we write each other letters which are always too austere, serious, grave . . .' So they must 'let up a little'. Still they both knew, he adds, how their 'austerity' never embittered or diminished their love—how much the contrary!

When at last they were married their life was almost as ideal as they expected; the only shadow was his occasional evening absences for Catholic Action, or a rarer journey from home on ministry business. 'Oh! God, God bless my Lina', he wrote once, 'bless me too; we want to give you glory, to rise to you by the way you have shown us, the way in which you give, you promise, us such happiness'.

A son, 'Pino', was born to them, and then to their joy another was on the way. On the 24th of February, Pino's first birthday, Lina said that evening, 'One would think our life was too beautiful'. Mario, as if with some sudden presentiment, added that as they then accepted blessings from God, they must be ready to accept the Cross. It was not long in coming.


A month later Mario, after an operation, was at death's door. Outside the clinic anxious friends succeeding each other included those he had so often helped—tram-conductors, boot-blacks, small tradesmen and many others. To the end he kept his extraordinary clearness and a perfect consciousness of what God was asking him to leave. As far as in him lay he said he would still help Catholic Action; his young wife and children, Pino and the unborn one, he committed confidently to God—Lina must do likewise. 'Christ is coming! No, not yet', he said once to her; and later: 'Look, Lina, what light! there in front of me'. He died on the 16th April, 1915.

Today, years later, his life has been written to perpetuate the precise inspiration he was to that generation of generous youth, to perpetuate the record of his human love neither lessened nor divided by the supreme passion of his life, his love of God.

## THE UNION OF LOVE

BY

COLUMBA CARY ELWES, O.S.B.

OVE of Christ, like all other love, tends toward union, only more powerfully since the spring of it is grace and is the perfection and summit of love. This is the mysterious fact, mysterious in its manner rather than in its accomplishment. In the Mahayana form of Buddhism all men are supposed to be called to a kind of union which merges their whole personality into the divine being, a kind of union which goes even beyond the hypostatic union in which the manhood of Christ was united to God in the divine Person of the Son. This Eastern conception has great attraction to some Western minds as an interpretation of Christ's personality and our uplifting. They say he acquired unity with God at the Baptism in Jordan, as though a man became God, and not God became man; that we too in our measure could be caught up into this unity. But this is heresy.

Christ was always God from his conception, that is from the instant his human soul was created; nor shall we ever lose our personality by becoming one with God. This, apart from being heresy, can be shown to be unreasonable. There would be sheer waste; for God, if he is God, is already complete and perfect. He can receive no addition. Consequently these people only say in effect that we cease to be, without any gain in God. Whereas God made us as an act of his love, and he loves his immortal creatures to the end; we are of our nature indestructible, so that 'the end' means eternity. Where then does love's union come?

In the case of Christ our Lord, had the Mahayanan idea been realised, had Christ been a Bodhisattva, his human Personality would have had to be destroyed; which thing is inconceivable. Perhaps it was to safeguard this great truth of the Incarnation that our Lady conceived still a Virgin. It was to show that though Christ had all things human, yet there was something divine, even at his birth. He was not just a normal child and then at thirty, after ascetic living, transformed.

We are not joined to God in our personality; that we retain. To lose it would be to cease to exist. Nor do we cease to have our nature. Thus the Christian answer to how we are united to God differs *toto coelo* from the Mahayanan. By grace we lose nothing; what was there is transformed, as the stained glass in a church window is transformed by sunlight, when before it was grubby, dull,



dead; as words are transformed by rhythm, as verse by music; as dead things by life. When grace enters the soul, when Christ takes a share in our life, he does not stultify our minds and our wills. Grace in the soul of man is something created; it is not the Essence of God himself acting, as it were, instead of the soul. By grace we become *like* God. When St Paul speaks of Christ living in us he does not mean that Christ occupies the soul in place of something essential in us. Grace is not Christ, it is a quality, a likeness to Christ in us. God, become man, gives us as near as may be a resemblance to his own divine and human union by giving us grace. The more we trust in the fact of having this new strength the more we may say that we are allowing Christ to live in us.

The union of love between us and God is the deepest or highest mystery, but some light has been given by the mystics and the theologians. We must follow St Thomas and St John of the Cross. By grace our minds are transformed so that they can truly know God, and knowing is our wonderful way of getting into touch with the outside, by which we create within us an image and not merely an image, we re-create reality in a spiritual, unextended way. We know things and people, they are mysteriously reproduced within us, not just as pictures but as beings. By grace, which is a likeness to God in our very life, we have a likeness to God in our life's most fundamental powers, those of knowing and loving. Our minds then have the power of knowing God in a god-like way, as he knows himself, not by hear-say, nor by remote images, nor through his creation, but in a real likeness to his very nature. The joy of this vision is reserved for the future life as until then all our knowing is indirect through and in the senses; they act as a kind of dark curtain, the glass through which we catch only glimmerings. Afterwards 'we shall see him as he is', we shall 'see him face to face', because we shall be 'like to him', 'partakers of the divine nature'. So much we know by faith; but what glory and joy that will give us we cannot conceive; 'eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard'. The mystics cry out in pain even at the touches that they have been allowed. Moses when he came down from the mountain was transfigured so that no man dared gaze upon him, his countenance shone with so unearthly a radiance. The return to this world after reaching to the seventh heaven is to all of them like coming into a living death. They would all wish to be dissolved and be with Christ. Even the sublimest thoughts seem to be as straw, worthless.

All this is the experience of the few, and its fullness is reserved for heaven that is to come. The union of love is for now. We love God

with a love of desire; and this is somewhat satisfied for we have God within us and specially so at Holy Communion. We also love God not just as a result of the urge for our own happiness finding its proper object in God, the infinitely good, but quite simply because God is in himself most lovable. But still we have not analysed this union.

The difficulty is to explain what the mystics mean by their language when describing the union which results from this love. As St Thomas says when speaking of the phraseology of St Augustine's devotion to the Platonists, 'certain people if they were not aware of this might be led into error by his words' (II-II, 23, 2 ad 1). According to him, the prince of theologians, grace is neither God in us, nor Christ in us, but a quality as it were created in the essence of our souls by God; likewise, that charity is a supernatural quality flowing from us, though a gift of God. The following is the language of St Thomas. He is answering the objection that 'just as the soul gives life to the body, so God gives life to the soul, and as it is written in Deuteronomy, "He himself is thy life" (c. 30, v. 20). But as the soul vivifies the body directly, therefore nothing comes between the soul and God. Therefore there is no need for a created grace in the soul'. His reply is as follows: 'God is the life of the soul as an efficient cause, but the soul is the life of the body by being its formal cause' (I-II, 110, 1 ad 2).

'Just as a man by his intellectual power shares in divine knowledge through the virtue of faith, and by his power of willing in the divine love through the virtue of charity; so, likewise, in the very essence of his soul man shares, by a kind of likeness, in the divine nature by means of a certain rebirth or re-creation' (I-II, 110, 4c).

'The gift of grace exceeds every power of created natures, since it is nothing else than a certain share of the divine nature, which exceeds every other nature. And so it is impossible for any creature to cause grace. It follows then necessarily that only God can deify, by communicating a share of the divine nature by a certain sharing by likeness; just as nothing else than fire can set fire to a thing' (I-II, 112, 1.c).

As for the humanity of our Lord, this is how he, St Thomas, explains its part in the work of grace: 'The humanity of Christ is as it were "an organ of his Divinity" as St John Damascene says (*Orthod. fid.* b. III. cap 15. à med.). The instrument does not do the work of the principal agent by its own power, but by virtue of the power of the principal agent. Consequently the humanity of Christ does not cause grace by its own power, but by the power of

the Godhead to which it is linked, and on account of which the actions of Christ's humanity have saving virtue.'

On the subject of charity St Thomas pursues the same point: 'The movement of charity does not come from the Holy Spirit in such a way that the human mind is utterly passive and in no way a source of its own movement, as when some body is moved by an extrinsic mover. This is against the very nature of the will, the spring of whose action must be within itself. It would indeed follow that to love would not be voluntary, which is a contradiction in terms, since love of its very nature is an act of the will. Likewise neither can it be maintained that the Holy Spirit moves the will to an act of loving as an instrument is moved, which, although it now is a source of the action, still is not within its power to will or not as it likes; that also would eliminate the freedom and therefore the merit of the act, for charity is the root of merit. But if the will is moved to loving by the Holy Spirit, it is also important that the will itself should effect the act. No act is perfectly produced by any active power unless it is within its capacity by reason of some quality of its nature, which will be the source of that act. Therefore, God who moves all things to their rightful ends, to each thing he gave a nature by which it is inclined to tend towards that end, preordained for it by God; and thus "he disposed all things wisely" (*Sap.* 8, 1). It is clear, however, that the act of of charity exceeds the nature of the will. Unless, then a new quality (*forma*) is 'added to the natural power, by which it will be inclined to an act of charity, this act would be less perfect than the natural acts and those of the other virtues; nor would it be easy or delightful. Which is clearly false, for no virtue has such an inclination to act as charity has. Therefore it is especially necessary that for the act of charity there should be in us some permanent quality (*forma*) added to the natural power, inclining it to the act of charity, making its performance easy and delightful' (II-II, 23, 2.)

The general conclusion to be drawn from this is that the union through grace and charity is not in the essence nor in the powers of the soul except in so far as there is in both cases a unity of likeness.

So there is a union between us and God, by his presence within us; by grace which is a close likeness, and by faith which gives us a reproduction of God in our minds, which feeble now, will be a glorious vision in heaven, stripped of the heavy veil of images and ideas. But all these are as nothing compared to the union of Love and Charity in the will. All these prepare for this, are essential prerequisites. In the love of hope, which, seeing what God is, longs for him as the only being capable of slaking our insatiable appetite



for good, we wrap him up in our own personality, consider him as part and parcel of ourselves. We wish all good for God, just as we do for ourselves. We do this not exactly so as to get something out of God, but, having made that initial judgment: that we were meant for God and God for our happiness, it follows that our destinies are locked; God's goodness is lovable in itself, because now we are united to him, his good is our good. It is in that way that the person loved is said to be in the lover.

But in the case of a creature's love of his God, it is the approach of the imperfect, the partial thing, to the whole and perfect and infinite Being. There is no thought at times of self but a relish of the mind, an entrancement of the soul, unable to help itself, before the unending beauty and goodness, perfection and glory, of God. This is perfect charity. The will goes, as it were, out of itself to God.

*En una noche oscura*

*Con ansias en amores inflamada,*

*Oh dichosa ventura!*

*Sali sin ser notada,*

*Estando ya mi casa sosegada.*

It is no longer a drawing of God into our puny orbit, but an approach, a sallying forth, a pilgrimage into the realm of God. We try and make our will, our desire, our vital movement, conform to God's will; it is a union of intention of action, not by unity or absorption, but by co-operation, a going hand in hand, a walking with God in the cool of the evening. So that, as we live by God's will, it is his will that we do; and he, unbelievable though it seems, does ours. The whims of the saints are done despite the frequent insignificance of their requests, as for instance when Soeur Thérèse in her sweet simplicity asked for falling snow and got it.

'Now over and above this likeness of faith, there is another likeness of love in the soul of the lover and it is in the will. In this, the likeness of the loved person is drawn in such a way and so closely and so vividly, when there is a union of love, that it is true to say that the loved person lives in the lover, and the lover in the loved one; and love gives such a likeness by the transformation of the lovers that it may be said that each is the other and that both are one. The reason is, because in the union and transformation of love the one gives possession of himself to the other, and thus each leaves himself and exchanges himself for the other; and thus each one lives in the other and the one is the other, and the two are one by transformation of love. That is what is meant by St Paul when he says: "But I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me". For by saying "but I live, now not I", he meant that although he lived, it was not now his life, because he was transformed into

Christ, and because his life was now more divine than human; and therefore he says that it is not he that lives, but Christ in him.'

This transformation that takes place is in the life of the Christian rooted in his substance. We mean that this transformation into the life of Christ—our activity, our vitality, our expression—the more it is submissive to God, the more his it is. We become the *willing* instruments of God, he acts through us. St Paul did not say, 'now not I *am*, but Christ *is* in me', but he used the key word 'live'. Thus we preserve our being and our will but our acts become God's, though our acts also, because we have become God's. As St John of the Cross says: 'For they, transformed in God, will live the life of God and not their own, and yet even so their own life, because the life of God will be their life' (loc cit: §8). The consummation of this will come only in heaven, and even St John of the Cross does not venture to describe its ineffable nature.


Even on earth this love is in a category on its own. It has nothing of self in it, but is a clear choice of the intellect, of our mind. Behold the goodness of God, immense, unfathomable, gentle and strong, so all-embracing as to leave nothing to be desired. Blindly by faith, we now know this, and in faith we wish for the blessedness to continue, and we place ourselves into the plan devised by Love itself. Christ, our God, too loves in return, with no gain to himself, but in all benevolence. '*Deus caritas est.*' He is the Son sent by a loving God.

Thus the Incarnation makes love between a creature and its God possible. God is here, so that we may converse together, and know each other's will; God is here in human form so that we may dare to think he cares for these little human things. In us we have this gift of grace, this God-likeness, so that our loving and knowing God become no idle boast or vain desire, or wishful thinking; God is now within our grasp. Thus comes the likeness in us of God, not the mere footprint of God, the distant echo in far off valleys, but true likeness of nature, and so of the thing known. From this springs a love that is insatiable, that sends men to the uttermost corners of the earth, and to complete burnt offerings of all else, including themselves, to gain nought else but God. Then finally, beholding so much splendour, even the darkness, the dawn of the sunrise, the human heart goes out towards that Dawn, goes to the love that has known no limit, the love Christ had for us, and joins itself to Christ and submerges itself in the Will and Perfection of God, happy to share even in a tiny way in the movement of the spheres, in the rhythm of God's love expressed in his Creation. 'Come. Lord Jesus.' For Christ is God, and God Love.

## THE LUMP OF SIN

BY

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.



IF we compare *The Cloud* with Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* or any other of the spiritual writings contemporary with that classic we shall be struck by the impersonal character of *The Cloud*. *The Scale* refers constantly to Jesus, the person, to whom everything returns in contemplation, and even a writer like St John of the Cross is really none the less personal in his approach to the source of faith and love. *The Cloud* does not often use the holy Name in spite of the great popularity of the devotion in those days; it is far more abstract and philosophical in tone.<sup>1</sup> Struck by this difference we might be tempted to say that this latter was a natural, a metaphysician's, approach. A great deal of emphasis is laid on a quasi-metaphysical apprehension of Being as such, which might seem to depend on the personal exercise of the worshipper.

Such a summary would miss the point of *The Cloud* entirely. The author, besides insisting that his words must be taken as a whole, seems to attack the philosophers and philosophical theologians in their speculations, and he says that the work is largely God's work. He describes perhaps more fully the 'human endeavour' of the soul desirous of union; and he, like most medievals, had less to say about the purely passive side of the spiritual life since that is so utterly God's concern.

But the complete denial to the philosophical interpretation is to be found in his doctrine about sin, for that plays no part in the philosophical programme. As soon as he has begun to describe how any thought even of the holiest creature must be put away in order to approach the naked Being of God, he turns to the consideration of sin which breaks into the peace of the cloud of unknowing. Thoughts will come crowding into the mind to distract, and although they may be about good or harmless things in themselves the fact of their presence in the mind and imagination is an effect of original sin—'for it is the pain of the original sin pressing against thy power' (p. 37)—so that their source is tainted. These thoughts must be smitten down at once without hesitation. For as these ideas come

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<sup>1</sup> But cf. c. 4. 'Right well hast thou said, "for the love of Jesu". For in the love of Jesu there shall be thine help. . . . Therefore love Jesu, and all thing that he hath it is thine'.



the will begins at once to be engaged with them. They will be either pleasing or unpleasing things—and according to this general division be divided up into the seven deadly sins. In this the author follows the scholastic teaching closely, and this tenth chapter of *The Cloud* should be compared with St Thomas's article on the Seven Deadly Sins (I-II, 84, 4). The Capital Sins are concerned with those things which move men's appetites most powerfully either towards the goods which please or from the evils from which they fly as being displeasing. They are natural objects of the appetites; thus St Thomas says: 'In the first place happiness implies perfection, since happiness is a perfect good, to which belongs excellence or renown, which is derived by *pride* or *vainglory*'. Or as *The Cloud* has it:

If this thought . . . be the worthiness of thy Mind, or thy Knowledge, or grace or degree, or favour, or beauty: then it is *Pride*. (p. 39).

These sins are capital because they are so close to nature, which is fallen, and which is so easily and rapidly moved in their direction if they are pleasing (causing 'some manner of delight') or away from them if they are displeasing ('causing some manner of grumbling').

But *The Cloud* is written for those who have already made some progress, so that the author considers the thoughts from which these desires so quickly spring, rather than the deeds which would follow in an undisciplined life. The difficulty for the man who is really intent upon following God in this way of prayer lies in the naturalness of these thoughts which may concern even his perfection, as St Thomas indicates. However naturally good that thought may be, as soon as

thou resteth thee in that thought, and finally fastenest thine heart and thy will thereto (p. 39),

it draws away from the supernatural good of the end to which the heart must be constantly attached. For the man habituated to serious sins these thoughts themselves may be deadly, because they spring from a heart already fastened completely to these things other than God.

The which fastening, although it may be deadly sin before; nevertheless, in thee, and in all other that have in a true will forsaken the world, such a liking or such a grumbling fastened in the fleshly heart is but venial sin. The cause of this is the grounding and the rooting of your intent in God. (p. 38).

There is danger of their becoming serious if these thoughts are allowed to remain 'unreproved'. In any case to the spiritual man *all* sin becomes so abhorrent that it matters little whether it be venial or deadly. The author says later that no special regard should be paid to the nature or extent of the sin; it is sufficient that it be sin to

let loose the saving flood of contrition. Certainly if there is any special sin accusing the conscience the contemplative will go at once to the Church's well to be washed by the waters of confession; indeed the sacrament of penance is a prerequisite for the beginning of this work (comp. *Cloud* cc. 28 and 35, and *Privy Counsel* c. 2). But a man who has begun to pray in the simple manner of this book will often realise the presence of sin arising from these natural inclinations only as a general state—'a blind root and a stirring of sin' (p. 90).

This general sense of sin with no particular accusation of conscience appears to be the experience of many contemplative people. St Thomas says, 'The infirmity of the flesh which belongs to the "*fomes*" of sin is in holy men the occasion of perfect virtue' (III. 27. 3 ad 2). Some souls are apparently called even to take a share in the work of Christ in bearing in themselves the guilt of the world; though of course the sense of guilt arises principally from these natural inclinations which have been tainted by original sin,

For it is the pain of the original sin pressing against thy power, of the which sin thou art cleansed in thy Baptism (p. 37).

Some people are dismayed by this strange feeling of guilt on account of which they are led to suspect some serious fault within themselves. They find in fact little of which to accuse themselves and they begin to pry about in their pasts to discover some unconfessed mortal sin. The possibility of some hidden evil of great consequence may not be excluded, but as a rule one who still lies under the burden of a forgotten or unperceived serious sin will suffer from a distaste or dryness in spiritual matters rather than from an overpowering sense of guilt. In any case should such a one be undertaking the work of *The Cloud* he will be led to expect this unspecified sin-consciousness.<sup>2</sup> The awareness of guilt may be a special grace granted someone by Christ to convey a suggestion of the unimaginable tortures of an unsullied human soul burdened with the guilt of the whole world; but very likely it will be a sign of the beginning of the work of *The Cloud*.

Every sinful act must of course be weighed and judged by conscience; but a man, though he may never be free from some venial sins in this life, must 'eschew recklessness in venial sin' (p. 40), and in this manner with the help of God's grace his conscious, and to that extent deliberate, faults may become rare. For those who use the waters of the sacrament of penance and of the presence of God in prayer it is possible to forget about their 'special deeds' whether they be good or evil, for in both cases the thought is apt to lead to some further sin, or at least to put up a barrier between the soul and God

<sup>2</sup> For an outline of St Thomas's conception of 'sin as distinct from sins' cf. 'Tasks for Thomists' sect. 4. by Victor White, O.P (BLACKFRIARS, 1944, pp. 105 sq).

at the time of this work of contemplation (cf. c. 31, p. 79 sq). In other words, apart from the times when duty demands a particular examination of conscience, a penitent may be counselled to cover all the past 'with a thick *cloud of forgetting*'. Worrying about past evils is often a great hindrance to the work of God in the soul. There may be reason for it, but frequently these troubles occur during periods of renewed effort such as during a retreat, and instead of progressing under the influence of God's presence the penitent becomes absorbed in the remembrance of details of events which happened many years ago. The principles of *The Cloud* may be profitably applied in such cases as these.

No one should be counselled to forget sin as such, for whereas past deeds may be the occasion of present temptations and troubles, the sense of guilt due to sin will peacefully humble the soul to nothingness before the inconceivable goodness of God. 'Without any means of reading or hearing coming before, and without any special beholding of anything under God', souls may be given 'sudden conceits and blind feelings of their own wretchedness or of the goodness of God'. (c. 36. p. 90). The word 'Sin' is simple and need not be analysed; but of itself it may bring great humility.

Mean by sin a *lump*, thou knowest never what, none other thing but thyself. (c. 36. p. 91).

And because that ever the whiles thou livest in this wretched life, thou must always feel in some part this foul stinking lump of sin, as it were oned and congealed with the substance of thy being. (c. 40. p. 100).

A full realisation of this lump would be literally devastating as it would reveal the very nothingness of one's being. And it is valuable to compare *The Cloud's* description of the true disciple's reaction to this lump—'so oft he goeth nigh mad for sorrow' (p. 107)—with Mother Julian's sudden and very metaphysical conviction that sin was 'no-thing'. *The Cloud* is equally fundamental in its description of sin, but although evil is not invested with any positive substance, the very lack of goodness and of God has such a terrible connotation that he weepeth and wailleth, striveth, curseth and denounceth himself; and (shortly to say) he thinketh that he beareth so heavy burthen of himself that he careth never what betides him, so that God were pleased. (p. 107).

Yet this sorrow, concerned as it is with the lump rather than with any specific acts or omissions with their concomitant circumstances, does not disturb the outer contemplative calm—'so that whoso looked upon thee . . . would think thee in a full sober restfulness' (p. 91)—



for the principal reality always bears him up. He never desires to 'un-be'.

For that were devil's madness and despite unto God. But he liketh right well to be; and he giveth full heartily thanks unto God, for the worthiness and the gift of his being. (p. 107).

The sense of the lump of sin coupled with the recognition of dependence on the being and goodness of God lead the soul not to troubled despair but to a placid sorrow. Sin thus removed of its sting becomes a great instrument in the way of contemplative prayer.

Before his description of this general sense of the lump of sin the author of *The Cloud* had already shown the disciple the way to remove its harmful qualities. First and foremost there is the means provided by the Church, the sacrament of penance; this, as we have seen, is taken for granted among those who wish thus to become contemplatives. After that we should expect to find strict, physical mortification, followed by weeping and meditating on the Passion. These indeed play their part; but in the eyes of the man who wrote *The Cloud*, being external things, they are not fundamental means and are liable to misfire.

Fast thou never so much, watch thou never so long, rise thou never so early, wear thou never so sharp. . . Yet will stirring and rising of sin be in thee. Yea and what more? Weep thou never so much for sorrow of thy sins, or of the passion of Christ, or have thou never so much thought of the joys of heaven, what may it do to thee? (c. 12. pp. 41-42).

All these external means are only relatively effective, and may in fact be useless. But there is one work which by itself 'destroyeth the ground and root of sin'. This is the 'blind stirring of love' to be sought in the *cloud of unknowing* in which all creatures, all actions, all thoughts are regarded as barriers between the soul and God. It is in fact the fire of charity which burns up all the guilt of sin. If we turn to St Thomas's doctrine on the effects of the Eucharist we shall find the same doctrine. 'The *res* or ultimate reality of this sacrament', he tells us, 'is charity not merely in habit but also in the fact, which is kindled in this sacrament and by means of which venial sins are forgiven', for charity removes venial sin by its very act. (III, 79, 4 c. and ad 3). A man who is actually loving God with the supernatural love of charity is thereby removing his sins according to the intensity of love's heat. This is in fact the essence of contemplation; the direct and actual love of God which cannot tolerate any obstacles, and so

'in this work a soul drieth up in itself all the root and the ground of sin that will always remain in it after confession, be it never so busy'. (c. 28. p. 75).

Having by this powerful and infallible means rid himself of the stain of sin, the next step towards reaching the general sense of unworthiness which is likened to a lump of sin identified with the very substance of self, is to forget the individual acts and omissions which caused the stains. This method can only be adopted after 'the great rust of sin be in great part rubbed away' by constant contrition over those individual sins in times gone by; and the guides, as in the whole of this work, must be both the man's own conscience and his director who between them decide when it is meet to abandon the past to the mercy of God.<sup>3</sup>

St Mary Magdalen stands as the great example of the contemplative attitude to sin. It was because she loved much that her sins were forgiven her, and she never came down from that love to pry about into the individual facts related by her conscience.

Came she therefore down from the height of her desire into the depth of her sinful life, and searched in the foul stinking pen and dunghill of her sins, searching them up one by one, with all the circumstances of them, and sorrowed and wept so much upon them each one by himself? (c. 16. p. 51).

Such conduct is unthinkable in that great penitent; for it would have easily set up an occasion for further sin. For her, at least, love was so strong that she had hardly to suppress such thoughts of the past consciously; all was burnt up in the fire of her attachment to God. But for the man who wishes to pray undisturbed while yet weighed down in humility by the lump of sin it is necessary to tread all memories under the cloud of forgetting. If they come crowding in so that it becomes difficult to avoid their presence in the mind the author proposes some spiritual wiles whereby they can be circumvented. The first is

try to look as it were over their shoulders, seeking another thing; the which thing is God, enclosed in a cloud of unknowing. (c. 32 p. 80).

In other words he must ignore these thoughts and imaginations as far as possible and concentrate on his desire for God.

The second device would appear to some to take unwarranted risks, for it might be interpreted as willingly entertaining thoughts and occasions of sin. But it must be remembered that the writer presupposes in his reader real generosity and true desire for union with God, and at the same time a complete honesty; he also presupposes a hatred of sin and the use of all the direct methods of

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<sup>3</sup> This doctrine should be compared with St Thomas's teaching as to when special contrition is required, and when a general sorrow suffices. Cf. I-II, 113, 5 ad 2; III, 87, 1; *Sup.* 2, 6.

removing its stains. He is speaking here of the thoughts about past sins for which the contemplative is constantly contrite, and, as he says, the device comes almost to the same thing as that of which we have been speaking above: the realisation of the lump of sin in self. This is the wily device he recommends:

When thou feelest that thou mayest in no wise put them down, cower thou down under them as a caitiff and a coward overcome in battle, and think that it is but folly to strive any longer with them; and therefore thou yieldest thyself to God in the hands of thine enemies. And feel then thyself as though thou wert overcome for ever. Take good heed of this device, I pray thee; for I think that in the proof of this device thou shouldest melt all to water. (c. 32. p. 81).

Evidently there could be no suggestion of encouraging or at least accepting evil thoughts. The method is one of profound humility. So many people regard their own natural efforts as being sufficient to overcome temptations. They stiffen themselves against the onslaught; they strain every nerve to rid themselves of bad thoughts and suggestions. But the natural powers are brittle rather than supple; they will often break suddenly and plunge the soul back into actual sins. There can be no true victory or success without the supple power of the Father, who must needs come to the aid of his weak and ailing child. The power of God is invincible; and as soon as the soul fully recognises this she can give up the unequal struggle and retreat hastily into the safety of God's hands. There has been a great deal written from the psychological point of view on the subject of 'relaxation'. Here we may find the theological counterpart of the same truth. If the man who is tempted relaxes not only all his muscles and limbs (which often become taut at times of the attacks of evil) but also his imagination and his mind, and if he lies back, so to speak, completely at his ease in the consciousness of the supporting presence of God, he will find that the evil suggestions depart. He must be conscious of his own nothingness, his own utter helplessness in the face of these evil powers, and conscious too of the supple power of the Spirit who enfolds him.

And this meekness meriteth to have God himself mightily descending, to venge thee of thine enemies, so as to take thee up and cherishingly dry thy ghostly eyes, as the father doth his child that is on the point to perish under the mouths of wild swine or mad biting bears. (id.).

*The Cloud* goes on to say that these devices may not always prove effective, and that in any case God through the inspiration of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit will teach each one the best devices for overpowering the thoughts of past sin. If they continue to reappear in



one's conscience they must be taken as a penance for the past sins themselves, until God sees fit to remove this pain of sin. The pain of original sin will never be removed and will always remain as an instrument of humility keeping the soul low and constantly beholden to God's mercy. But the pain of actual, past sin may eventually practically disappear so that a man may be almost preoccupied by the goodness of God, or rather by God in himself. (c. 33.)

In conclusion we may see by turning again to chapter 44 (in which we have already seen the principal description of the lump of sin) that all this teaching is embraced in the notion of a true and placid contrition. Perfect contrition is all that is required of the soul to dispose itself for the divine work of infused contemplation. That is to say, a perfect contrition which concerns itself rather with the general wretchedness of the sinner than with his special sins. This 'strong and deep ghostly sorrow' comes neither by strain of body nor by stress of spirit; it is rather 'a sleeping device, all forsobbed [i.e. soaked] and forsunken in sorrow'. It is a sorrow which comes not only from the thought of *what* a man is, but from a realisation *that* he is. It opens the heart of man with a sense of complete and utter dependence upon God himself. This method of perfect sorrow amounts to the last stages of active preparation for the divine gift of contemplation. It may therefore be included under the heading of Acquired Contemplation as one of the chief acts which a man can perform with the help of grace to dispose himself for 'illumination' and union.<sup>4</sup>

And all this is removed *toto coelo* from the purely natural sphere of the metaphysician, who knows nothing of a metaphysical humility based on a knowledge of sin, although it may be expressed in terms of a metaphysical dependence on the Being of God.


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<sup>4</sup> The whole of this 44th chapter should be read with great care.

# A MEDIEVAL DOMINICAN MARITIME MISSIONARY

BY

PETER F. ANSON

 HANKS to the preservation of an exceptionally detailed and graphic journal, kept by a certain German Dominican for the entertainment and edification of his brethren, it is possible to form a clear idea of what seafaring conditions were like on the Mediterranean towards the close of the fifteenth century.<sup>1</sup> What is more, we learn that the spiritual welfare of both passengers and crews was not neglected, at least in ships carrying pilgrims to the Holy Land.

Brother Felix Fabri was a member of the community of the Dominican Priory at Ulm. In 1480 he managed to obtain permission from the Master General of the Friars Preachers to make a pilgrimage to Palestine. Four years later he repeated this journey. His travel diaries are remarkable for their wealth of topographical detail, but even more for the subtle humour that creeps in on every page. Br Felix never minimises the discomfort of travel or the hardships he endured, but he can smile over them as he looks back. Nothing seems to have escaped the eye of this German friar; he notices everything, and on the least excuse starts off on a long dissertation on matters of general as well as religious interest. His erudition is amazing; his knowledge of maritime life surprising when we remember that he was a native of Bavaria, and had never beheld the sea or a ship until he arrived at Venice. Whereupon he devotes about 4,000 words to a treatise on 'The Threefold Nature of the Sea', and several more pages describing the various perils of those who travel by sea. Then follows a detailed account of the Mediterranean ships of this period, in particular the Venetian galleys in which the pilgrims sailed to Palestine. Having studied this section of the book one has no excuse for not knowing the difference between a *bireme* and *trireme*, or how the sails were hoisted, or how the galley slaves worked their oars.

Conditions aboard the oldest and dirtiest modern tramp-steamer are luxurious when compared with those of a typical medieval sailing ship. Many of the pilgrims were wealthy nobles who, had

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<sup>1</sup> *The Book of the Wanderings of Felix Fabri*. Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society. 2 vols. 1896.

they been alive today, would have occupied private suites in a luxury liner. But they had no choice but to put up with worse discomfort even than that in emigrant ships of the last century. The male passengers were herded together in a manner that would now be regarded as hardly fit for cattle. They lived, slept and took their meals—when the weather was too stormy for them to eat on deck—in one large cabin. There was no privacy of any kind. The women occupied a smaller cabin by themselves. During the day the mattresses and blankets were rolled up and stowed away, in much the same way as a blue-jacket stows his hammock. At night, priests and laymen made up their beds on the hard deck, side by side, with their feet towards one another. The feet of the sleepers reached to their chests and other luggage which was piled up amidships. If anybody had need to go on deck during the night, he had to walk over the bodies of the other passengers. Not infrequently, when the vessel was sailing before the wind and heeling over, the sleepers on one side would fall on top of each other. Brother Felix remarks that 'monks who are accustomed to sleep alone in their cells find it hard to sleep on shipboard because of their restless or snoring neighbours'. The narrow mattress, the hard pillow, and above all, the heat and many 'foul vapours' added to the general discomfort. The only light and ventilation came from the hatchways, which were battened down in rough weather. Fleas and lice swarmed everywhere, also mice and rats. We read that there is 'among all the occupations of seafarers one which, albeit loathsome, is yet very common, daily, and necessary—I mean, the hunting and catching of lice and vermin'.

After the pilgrims had gone below at night, there was 'a tremendous disturbance when they made up their beds; the dust was stirred up, and great quarrels arose between those who are to lie side by side, for one blames his neighbour for overlapping a part of his berth with his bed, the other denies it; the first persists that he is so doing'. Then, very often, naked swords and daggers were drawn, and a fight ensued. When peace was restored another quarrel would start. 'Often times, I may say every night, I have risen silently and gone into the open air, and have felt as though I had been freed from some filthy prison', so Brother Felix adds. The constant tramping and running about of the sailors overhead, likewise the noise of the wind and the waves, made sleep difficult.

During the day the force of the wind or waves breaking over the vessel often made it impossible for the passengers to remain on deck. All they could do was to stay below in their dark, crowded, hot and smelly quarters. The smoke from the kitchen blew into it. Whenever the bilge water was pumped out, and this was frequent



during stormy weather, the stench was overpowering. So the long days at sea could be very monotonous. Some men, so brother Felix tells us, passed the whole time either gambling or drinking. Water was scarce, but there seems to have been plenty of wine. Others played musical instruments, others ran about the deck, climbed the rigging or played games. There were some who read books, or occupied their time in endless arguments. 'I have sometimes seen so many quarrels and disputes arise from the most trifling causes that the galley was like hell with their curses and blasphemies. I have marked it for a fact that the movement of all human passions is more violent on the water than elsewhere.'

The noblemen had their own servants to cook meals; the other passengers had to be content with the food provided by the captain. Brother Felix describes these meals. In fine weather the tables were 'well and orderly set out on the poop', and the hour of dinner and supper announced by four trumpeters. Everybody rushed to seize a place; those who came late had to sit outside the poop on the galley slaves' bench—in the sun, rain or wind. The officers had their meals after the passengers, and the captain had his food on silver dishes. The meat provided was often disgusting, for sick animals were slaughtered, even diseased sheep. The presence of live animals on board must have added to the varied smells. The pious Dominican remarks that 'unless Divine Providence had thus ordered it, no man could live on board of large old ships'.

Such then is a brief idea of the manner of life aboard a fifteenth century passenger ship. The conditions described by Brother Felix cannot have been very different to those of earlier times, or throughout the following century, when ships were making much longer voyages across the Atlantic and to the Far East. He is such a minute observer that lack of space makes it impossible to refer to countless other details he records, all of which are interesting. Having thus sketched in the background, let us deal with the religious life at sea four hundred years ago.

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Weather permitting, it was customary to hold three services daily on the galleys and other ships carrying passengers. Soon after the sun had risen above the horizon the boatswain blew his whistle to rouse the sleepers and bring them on deck. When all were assembled he held up a board on which was a painting of our Lady and her Divine Child. On beholding this, all knelt down and said the *Ave Maria* and other prayers. When these morning devotions

were ended the sound of a bugle was a sign for the crew to start work.

'About the eighth hour before midday' another signal for prayer was sounded. A chest which stood on the upper deck, near the mast, was covered with a linen cloth, with two candles, a crucifix, and a missal. The passengers and crew gathered round the mast. 'Then comes the priest wearing a stole about his neck, and begins the *Confiteor*, and from thence he reads the service which follows, leaving out the Canon which he does not read, because he does not consummate; thus he performs the Mass without the sacrifice, ending it with the Gospel "In the beginning was the Word". These Masses are termed "dry" or "torrid". . . . They chant such Masses as these on feast days, but the sacrifice of the Eucharist is never consummated on shipboard.'

Brother Felix states that in earlier ages Mass was celebrated at sea in fine weather, and produces evidence that the Blessed Sacrament was reserved in some ships. But he is bold enough to express the opinion that he regards it as a great piece of negligence on the part of the Church that provision had not been made long ago for administering the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist 'to men who are in the midst of such great perils, and more especially to pilgrims, who are enduring those perils for the love and honour of God. On the other hand he produces fifteen reasons why 'our wise and holy mother Church doth not desire the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist to be consummated, nor yet reserved on board ship'—too long to be given in this article, although of great interest.

Towards sunset a third service was held round the mainmast, where all knelt to sing the *Salve Regina*. During bad weather or 'exceeding great straits' the Litanies of the Saints were recited. After the *Salve* the captain's coxswain blew a call on his whistle, and standing on the poop, wished everyone good-night in the name of the master. Then he held aloft the painting of Our Lady. The passengers and crew, standing below him on the main deck, recited the *Ave Maria* thrice. When the pilgrims had gone below to prepare beds for the night, the 'clerk of the galley' stood on the poop, where he began a 'long chant in the common Italian tongue', and joined thereunto a litany to which all the galley slaves and officers of the ship replied on their bended knees. 'They use many words', Brother Felix remarks, 'and this prayer of theirs lasts for about a quarter of an hour. At the end thereof he begs everyone to say one *Pater Noster* and one *Ave Maria* for the souls of the parents of St Julian'. Our Dominican pilgrim tried to discover who was this particular saint, but different explanations were given him by the officers.

The material conditions of life on board these medieval ships were appalling. It is evident from the accounts left us by travellers that every sort of vice and immorality was indulged in both by the passengers, officers, crew and galley slaves. They had the faith all right, but their morals might have been better! Yet, not content with the public devotions at sea, many other prayers were said by the pilgrims both by night and by day. 'As soon as they arrive at any port, all run to church with the utmost devotion to hear Mass. But as for the celebration of Sundays and saints' days at sea, I declare that they are most infamously kept. . . . I have often observed on solemn feast days there is always a greater disturbance on board ship than at other times; and sometimes when we have laid four or five days in some harbour, as soon as Saturday evening comes we make ready to set out, and, having started, sail all night, so that on Sunday no Mass can be held. . . . Indeed, the holier the day the harder is the work done at sea.'

Brother Felix tells us that it was his custom on board any ship to preach a sermon on holy days, but often this was resented, and he decided that it was wiser not to 'cast his pearls before swine' or to 'pour out his words when there were none to hear'. On another voyage, so he relates, many noblemen objected to his sermons, believing that he was holding them up as examples of certain vices.

It appears that priests making sea voyages did not carry the Holy Oils, so the Last Sacraments could never be given on board ship. When anybody died, the body was rolled in a shroud, and rowed ashore if the ship was able to put into a port where there was a Christian cemetery; if not the body was committed to earth elsewhere. If the vessel was near 'a land of the infidels' they did not take the body ashore, but cast it into the sea. 'They take the shroud, pour sand on it from the hold, lay the corpse on the sand and roll it up, tying a bag of stones to the feet. Then, in the presence of the whole ship's company, the priests chanting *Libera me, Domine*, the galley-slaves take up the body and let it fall into the sea in the name of the Lord; and straightway the body, thus weighted with stones, sinks into the depths, and the soul climbs to heaven. . . . Many think this to be the noblest kind of burial, and preferable to being crushed by the weight of the earth.' When Venetian grandees died at sea their bodies were buried in the sand within the ship, and brought back to Venice.

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Our observant and practical-minded Dominican pilgrim goes to the trouble of giving much advice to those who are making a sea



voyage for the first time. He says that he has seen men who ate, drank, and did whatever they pleased at sea, who kept no rule of diet, yet withal never took to their beds, and always were cheerful and happy. Others, on the contrary, no matter what precautions they took, were ill all the time. He warns us of the dangers of bathing from a ship, even in calm weather. He reminds us that decks are often slippery, and that ropes should not be trusted unless they are firmly stretched. Care must be taken to keep on good terms with the officers, crew, and in particular galley-slaves, for 'it is a ruinous thing for a man to have enemies on board ship'. We must avoid sitting on any ropes, lest the wind should change suddenly and we are thrown overboard. Look out for blocks and pulleys—they can kill a man outright if they hit him! Do not get in the way of the crew, for even if you should be a bishop, they will push you over and tramp on you 'because work at sea has to be done with lightning speed, and admits of no delay'. Be cautious where you sit, for every place is covered with tar, which becomes soft in the heat of the sun. Above all, be on your guard against thieves, and always carry your money on your person, 'for men are strangely apt to play the thief on board ships, even though they may abhor thieving when not at sea, especially in the matter of trifles'. Lastly, when you go ashore in any port, beware of entering inns, especially after dark, for by so doing, there is great danger not only to honour and goods, but even to life. 'For the inns of the isles of the sea are houses of ill-fame, kept for the most part by Germans, who dwell there with courtesans; albeit they send them away when pilgrims enter their houses. . . . Experience will teach a man many other things to be avoided and shunned.'

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Such then was the manner in which priests carried on the sea apostolate four hundred years ago. As Brother Felix reminds us, 'a journey by sea is subject to many hardships', and quotes Ecclesiasticus XLIII, 2: 'they that shall sail upon the sea, tell of the danger thereof, and when we hear it with our ears we marvel thereof'. It needed heroic courage and great faith for a priest, monk, or friar to leave his normal environment to face a very different way of living—'the perils caused either by the sea, the wind or the ship; likewise the special perils without number, arising either from a man's own disposition, or from evil companionship, or from want of food and drink, or from bad steersmen, or excessive heat or cold, or bad equipment, and the like, of which perils there are so many that words would fail me should I attempt to tell them all'.

So we can picture these medieval missionaries of the sea, conducting morning and evening prayers on the deck of a galley, or celebrating their 'Dry Masses' while it was often hard for them to keep their balance, what with the rolling and pitching of the vessel. They consoled and encouraged the sick; warned open sinners of the fate that awaited them if they did not repent and give up their evil ways; set an example by their own lives; their patience and acceptance of discomfort and hardships. Had it not been for them there would have been nobody on board to speed many a soul on its last voyage, and to commit the body to the sea. Very few of the names of these sea apostles of the later Middle Ages have been recorded, but, thanks to *The Book of the Wanderings of Brother Felix Fabri* we are able to visualise how others besides himself revealed Christ to seamen.

## REVIEWS

A SIMPLE WAY OF LOVE. By a Poor Clare, edited and introduced by Columba Cary Elwes, O.S.B. (Burns Oates; 6s.)

As the Editor of this little book well remarks, 'it is obviously written for nuns. This may keep many from reading it, even nuns. But that would be a pity, as the spirit is strong and manly, full of sound sense and humour, besides being uncompromising'. God calls all souls to a loving union with him. This is obtained by uniting the will lovingly with his. In religion this is more easily attained, though the young aspirant will soon discover that he or she has not left behind self-love, which is the greatest obstacle to the love of God. The love of God is not a matter of sentiment, nor does it consist in performing great and extraordinary austerities, or in prolonged prayer. Such practices are only pleasing to God when they are according to his will, 'but if they are not His Will they are a danger to the soul who seeks holiness in them and neglects to do the Will of God in humbler ways'.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the only one way to know and love God. 'Some tell us that to attain to union with God we must tread down all created images under our feet, even the humanity of Jesus must be left behind as we strive to dart up to the Godhead. No, this is not the way. Union with God cannot be arrived at by any forcing of the will; no, not even by any fervent effort except the effort be the sacrifice of the will in love. There is no other way to union but looking at Jesus and desiring Him, and then, for the sake of that desire, renouncing all other desires, even the desire of pleasing yourself'. It is Jesus who sends his Spirit of Love forth. In the Heart of

Jesus we find God. Life's work is to overcome self-love and put the love of God in its place.

The writer shows more than human prudence in her chapter on Poverty. She admits that external changes may be necessary sometimes, but the interior spirit must never be sacrificed. Elaborate labour-saving devices would introduce a spirit of worldliness. 'This does not forbid simple hand-worked tools such as working people can afford, which will lighten heavy work and enable our sisters to dispense with a man's help and prevent the work encroaching on the time of prayer or exhausting the sisters beyond their strength. Instances of such justifiable helps are sewing machines and hand-cultivators, where a large garden is cultivated, but not those driven by electricity or motor power. Electric lighting and central heating may be used, as these are better for the health and more economical than more old-fashioned lighting and heating methods. When an old customary article has gone so far out of general use that it would cost more to procure than a more modern article, the cheaper modern one would be more in keeping with holy poverty'. These points have a deeper significance and a wider range than the proverbial Victorian umbrella, which religious decorum would not allow to be used as a walking-stick. Some amusing anecdotes are told to illustrate that the rigorous spirit of poverty is not best expressed by charging others with expenses incurred.

A timely note of warning concerning manifestation of conscience is attached to Chapter VI. But it does not sufficiently modify what is written on p. 48, where it is positively advocated that nuns should choose as their director their own superior, in preference to the confessor, on the grounds that he has insufficient understanding. This prevalent view can only be described as false and is open to very many objections. A lady superior who has not the theological learning to function as a spiritual director will inevitably take the layperson's viewpoint, and there is no safeguard to prevent her from using her information in the external régime, not to say in other ways.

In a discerning final chapter for Superiors, they are reminded of their responsibilities, and not to use their power to impose their personal tastes or opinions on their communities, unless there are good reasons for believing that those things are according to the Will of God.

The book is an example of wise simplicity, and is of tremendous value even to the learned if they are wise enough to follow the simple way which is Christ.

AMBROSE FARRELL, O.P.



CHRIST'S WAY. By Mother Simeon, S.C.H.J. (Douglas Organ; 7s. 6d.)

This book of meditations for young women demands considerable commendation because it teaches the active virtues without discarding contemplation. It follows the gospel story quite simply; and because the thought is rich it will last a long time, because it is shrewd it will keep prayer alive. 'Christ had to snatch his peace and his short times with his Father just as we do'—the woman taken in adultery had a claim on Christ because she was his neighbour—Cosmetics like sweets can be the object of renunciation. These are samples of a book whose strong spirit will warm the heart the more deeply as it is taken in small measures.

CHRIST IN HIS MYSTICAL BODY. By C. J. Woollen. (Sands; 6s.)

As the title declares this is an attempt to explain the doctrine of the Mystical Body simply. Simplicity seems often to cloak ill-digested theology, but we can be grateful for the parallel use of Old and New Testaments and the highlights thrown on a few neglected truths such as the angels' place in the Mystical Body.

QUESTIONS THEOLOGIQUES SUR LE MARIAGE. By Edmond Boissard, O.S.B. (Les Editions du Cerf; Blackfriars).

Canon Masure has recently pointed out how often the seminary course passes over far too briefly the very sacrament for which the student is supposed to be spending all his time in preparing. Less disastrous, but still inexcusable, is the even hastier treatment of the one sacrament that he will never receive or even confer. Not as if marriage were neglected in the seminaries. Now, more than ever, the greatest care is given to the study of the Canon Law and Moral Theology of marriage: all the possible ways in which impediments might arise are mastered, the regulations *de usu matrimonii* are known—sometimes with mathematical precision—and the horrifyingly liberal views of saintly theologians on conjugal rights duly noted. But how many priests have been equipped with an adequate exegesis of Luke xx, 34-36, or could satisfy a devoted couple as to how their love will endure in heaven?

Dom Boissard devotes a special and most illuminating chapter to marriage 'dans l'au delà' in this thoroughly scientific, but eminently readable and attractive *Dogmatic* theology of matrimony. That particular question is of course not the most important and, after briefly answering those who argue, 'In the good old days people just got married and got on with it. Why bother them with theology?' he devotes a third of the book to the elucidation of the meaning (*sens*) and ends of marriage. He very graciously apologises for his repeated criticisms of the views of Dr Herbert Doms at this point and he insists on the notable contribution that the latter has made by bringing out the tremendous importance of an essential if secondary end and the profound spiritual unity of those joined in one flesh. Defend-

ing the traditional view, he shows that this is far from being a rationalist or utilitarian conception: marriage is assimilated to the union of Christ and his Church and is therefore at once a mystical and a fruitful union. The ends must not be torn apart and, although mutual love may be regarded as the *immediate* end, directly attained, it must be subordinated to the more fundamental, more universal end of life itself—natural and supernatural—and the education proportioned to it.

In the remaining essays, apparently distinct but following very conveniently on one another, he writes calmly, sympathetically, and with suave judgment on all the main topics of the Church's doctrine of marriage. Of particular interest to many questioners at the present time is the final essay on sanctity in the married state. Of the possibility and the fact of married saints there can of course be no doubt, that marriage as a way to holiness is a part of Catholic teaching and springs from the nature of the sacrament; but married saints are notably fewer than the unmarried and the virtues which have justified their canonisation do not owe anything to the married state as such; on the other hand virginity—not mere celibacy—does involve such total detachment that it is of itself a most apt means of reaching heroic sanctity. The grace of marriage is unique; it makes husband and wife love Christ in one another. But the fruitful love of virginity is more direct.

EDWARD QUINN

THE WAY OF THE MYSTIC. By H. C. Graef. (Mercier Press; 10s. 6d.)

The spirit of this well-written and balanced work is contained in the author's belief expressed with obvious sincerity that if we knew how to use our supernatural powers we, of seemingly lesser ambitions and opportunities, would live a mystic union with God to his greater glory and to a deepening of the vitality of Holy Church. In the Introduction which adequately deals with the theological foundations of mysticism she writes: 'The mystics have known both the gift and the boundless munificence of the Giver, who desires to bestow it even now as lovingly as He desired it by the well in Samaria. If we but knew the gift of God, and had the confidence of St Paul in Him "who is powerful to do superabundantly above all we ask or think, according to the power that operates in us", that is according to the life of grace energising our whole being if we will but let it do so'.

Written in a clear style and with practical emphasis, the book shows the way to union with God taught by fifteen contemplative souls. These studies, though brief, are not at all superficial and much thought has gone into their making. The majority of the important schools find adequate representation. Thus, the reader is offered understanding studies of those great personalities such as Bernard of Clairvaux and St Catherine of Siena whose practical influence upon Popes and kings still excites our bewildered imagination, as well as

ample analyses of the Dominican and Franciscan inspirations. She has not forgotten those lovers of the Sacred Heart, St Gertrude and St Margaret Mary, nor that gently persuasive soul, St Francis of Sales, and needless to say, St Teresa and St John of the Cross appear in all their mystic splendour.

The conclusion is happily and lucidly retrospective. From the study of *The Way of the Mystics* two great realities become apparent. They are the need of prayer and penance, especially in our own troubled days. Miss Graef has succeeded in making her book of value to the ordinary reader for she does not neglect to emphasise the methods common to all the mystics in their attempts to intensify their life of prayer, nor does she forget to mention the simple penances blessed by the greatest saints in their seeking after self-purification.

Attached is a Bibliography which, however brief, would form an excellent choice to be made by one who proposes to explore the inexhaustible field of Mystical Theology.

FR CASSIAN, O.F.M.Cap.

LEADERSHIP AND LIFE. By Dr. J. G. Vance. (The Grail; 5s.)

This book arose from a series of talks given by Dr Vance at Grail Headquarters in London to a group training to be leaders. It is not surprising that under the title *Leadership for Women* the published talks ran into many impressions. This is a re-model, with about half as much material again added.

Priest and psychologist, Dr Vance has given to English Catholics a book which may well become a classic. Its closely packed wisdom provides an examination of conscience, an inspiration and a fund of humour. It was intended for women, but if only all who wield authority—priests, nuns and men layleaders included—were to read it and, under grace, apply it, leadership in the Catholic body would gain much sweet reasonableness and be saved from many mistakes, aberrations and rifts. A few headings may be suggestive. 'Meaning what you say'—Do we know our insincerities, and how can we eliminate them? 'Jealousy.' 'How to delegate authority.' 'Weighing your words'—'Never say anything harsh; and here, as always, when I say "never" I mean, literally, never.' 'How to ruin a cause'—Dr Vance, turned Screwtape, rejects obvious devices to suggest that he 'would simply infuse into all the members of the movement a spirit of utter complacency, and into the leader a wondrous self-complacency.' 'Correspondence'—'It is one aspect of courtesy . . . leaders are more roundly cursed for failure in correspondence than most things.' What if a letter requires time for thought?—'I plead earnestly for the habit of interim correspondence . . . such a note takes but a few minutes and keeps your correspondent from living on tenterhooks.'

The best section is perhaps 'The Pivot of Leadership: Honour'. It contains an analysis of our meaning of the word which Dr Vance



says took him four or five years of thought. Then there are splendid pieces of sense: 'In the whole range of character-study and character-training I know of no principle more important than that of aiming at something positive . . . characteristics are overcome only by contrary characteristics. . . . It is not much use to start a "character diary"—"Monday, Tuesday . . . etc. forenoon, meanness 4; afternoon, meanness 3; etc." . . . If you must write, put down your efforts at the opposite quality of generosity. . . . This may encourage you to develop the quality that will stifle the meanness.' One more quotation on leaders led to ruin by 'Yes' men: 'I once knew a chief who was selecting an executive counsellor. He said, mentioning So-and-so, "I hear he is very difficult. . . . Do you think he will stand up to me sometimes and tell me to my face that I'm wrong?" I replied, "You may count to the last on his loyalty, and wherever necessary on his unflinching resistance." "Oh!" said the chief, "I was warned against him. I wonder why. He's obviously my man." ' Finally, there is excellent advice on how to use our English quality of initiative.

A review of such a book had better be candid. We confess that the illustrations put us off. Perhaps they would attract others.

DOM RALPH RUSSELL, O.S.B.

THE JESUS PSALTER. With Notes by M. M. Merrick. Preface by Fr Conrad Pepler, O.P. (Duckett; 3s. 6d.)

The Jesus Psalter is a typically English devotion which was widely used by Catholics in the days of persecution. It is a spiritual classic and has become a standard prayer to be found in our approved manuals. It is right and proper that it should be constantly reprinted because it should be in constant demand. We are glad to welcome this new edition with valuable Notes which link up the prayer with the English martyrs and supply the historical background.

Fr Conrad Pepler in his all-too-brief Preface shows us how this devotion is traditional, having its roots in the middle ages when preachers and mystics taught the people to love and reverence the Holy Name. By that Name we are saved. 'No man cometh to the Father but by me.' So the passionate love for the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ will find its expression in the loving repetition of that Holy Name, 'joy in the ear, honey in the mouth, melody in the heart', in the phrase Richard Rolle borrows from St Bernard. Our forefathers, when true to their Catholic past, were not shy about the fervent use of this devotion and wherever the Christian spirit has survived the love of the Holy Name is characteristic, as we see in the hymns of Charles Wesley, 'Jesus, Lover of my soul' and 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild', and Toplady's once popular 'Rock of Ages cleft for me': these hymns in spirit and expression are in the same Christian tradition.

It is remarkable that the Feast of the Holy Name was authorised in England by Pope Alexander VI in the sixteenth century, two hundred years before the feast was kept by the universal Church. This English tradition no doubt owes its origin to the preaching of the Friars of St Francis and St Dominic, who vied with one another in propagating this devotion.

Today we have the wonderful success of the Holy Name Society in the United States and Australia. Wherever this devotion prevails there is a manifest reawakening of Catholic life. People who are unacquainted with the Jesus Psalter should not delay in getting a copy and using it. It will be a new experience and a means of grace.

BERNARD DELANY, O.P.

THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL: A MODERN INTERPRETATION. By Georgia Harkness. (Andrew Melrose; 8s. 6d.).

In her introduction the author speaks of the need to treat of spiritual desolation in religious therapy and in the psychology of religion. It is one point, apparently, which has been overlooked in discussing the relation of religion to health. So she writes 'for those who have tried earnestly, but unsuccessfully, to find a Christian answer to the problem of spiritual darkness'. Later Professor Harkness quotes with approval 'an unusually able professor of biochemistry—"When the ductless glands are out of order, it is as impossible to achieve victorious spiritual living by an act of will as it would be to walk without legs"'. This will reveal the nature of the book. The publishers rightly refer to the 'limitations' imposed by the author on herself; for these limitations appear to be the exclusion of the supernatural and the use of a sound common sense and psychological experience for immediately human ends. She makes use of St John of the Cross, Madame Guyon, Thomas à Kempis, and similar writers on the supernatural life to support her treatment of depressive characters or depressed states. It is very practical within its compass, but that compass is so narrow that it is dangerous. To skim the 'psychology' from the mystics in order to find more instruments and medicine for 'therapy' in its various modern forms is the opposite to removing the cream from the milk. The cream is lost and the watery 'skim-milk' gives little nourishment though it may temporarily remove a thirst.

JOHN HUNSTER

PLATFORM REPLIES. Volume One. By the Very Revd. J. P. Arendzen. D.D., Ph.D., M.A. (Mercier Press; 5s.)

Dr Arendzen has gathered together the answers he has provided to questions put during several years to members of the Catholic Missionary Society. They cover a vast field, from the philosophy of Spinoza to the Serpent in Paradise, from Purgatory to Psychoanalysis. It is not difficult to give debating answers to the muddled

queries of the man-in-the-street. What is harder—and more valuable—is to go behind the question, often pitifully inadequate to express a real difficulty, and to understand its presuppositions. It is here that Dr Arendzen is most helpful, and anyone who is engaged in Evidence Guild speaking, or indeed who is merely anxious to clear his own muddle of mind, will find in *Platform Replies* a charitable and discerning guide to many modern misconceptions about the Catholic Faith and will find too a brief but effective means for their resolution.

I.E.

THE AKATHISTOS HYMN. Translated by Fr Vincent McNabb, O.P.

With Notes by Donald Attwater. (Blackfriars Publications; 3s. 6d.)

OUR MOTHER CHURCH, HER WORSHIP AND OFFICES. C. Svegintzev. (S.P.C.K.; 3s. 6d.)

In recent years, with the full and solemn encouragement of the Holy See, there has been a notable increase in the interest shown in the Eastern Churches and their rites and traditions. Knowledge of these can only result in the deepening of our appreciation of the richness and splendour of the Faith. The Akathistos Hymn is one of the best known forms of prayer used in the Byzantine Rite, being composed in honour of the Mother of God and commemorating the great events of her life. The translation into the English language of liturgical texts composed by an exuberant people is notoriously difficult, while the requirements of modern devotion are more exacting than those of our forefathers. Consequently Fr McNabb's translation, while of great use to 'Ecclesia discens' in showing those whose Greek is pedestrian the images, concepts and formulas used by the Byzantines in worship, will hardly commend itself to 'Ecclesia Orans' in spite of the attractive way in which it has been bound and printed. It is too literal and in consequence upsets our recollection. The notes by Donald Attwater are both interesting and informative.

C. Svegintzev's book will be extremely useful to all those interested in the Byzantine Rite. It gives a description of the church and its furniture, and goes through all the ceremonies, the Eucharistic Liturgy, Baptism, funerals, Holy Week, etc., in detail without confusing the reader in the way that handbooks of ceremonial usually do.

RICHARD BLUNDELL, S.J.

ANNE DE ROUSIER. Translated from the French by L. Keppel. (Sands; 4s.)

This unusual life of a nun begins with a murder. Anne de Rousier was only eight years old then. In due time she became a nun of the Society of the Sacred Heart. She saw the early days of the Revolution in Italy when her community had to be dispersed from their convent at Turin. Travelling was difficult and dangerous, and cross-



ing the Alps by coach to reach the Mother House in Paris was extremely uncomfortable. But it was nothing to the later adventures of this heroic nun. For Mother de Rousier was sent as a missionary to found houses of her Society in South America. Her Superiors had obviously no idea what the conditions of travel were in that part of the world. The details of that terrible journey from North America into the wildernesses of the South, in order to reach Chile, are hair-raising. Mother de Rousier was neither young enough nor strong enough to enjoy being hurtled about on the back of a mule, a capricious creature leaping at one moment on to rocks five foot or more in height while at another moment refusing to move at all. On crossing one of the most dangerous summits of the route the mule suddenly lay down on its side and threw Mother de Rousier over the edge of a precipice. Had it not been for the branches of a tree projecting from the cliff half way down, which caught her in her fall, she would have been dashed to pieces on the rocks below. As it was, it was all she could do to hang on to the tree until two unwilling natives were lowered down to her rescue. In spite of everything Mother de Rousier arrived at her destination. The delays and setbacks seemed endless, but in face of all the difficulties put in her way, and of every kind of hardship Mother de Rousier and her two or three companions succeeded in making not one, but several foundations in South America.

This little book, which is not lacking in humour, is a simply written record of a valiant and saintly woman.

FFLORENS ROCH.

THE CURE OF ARS. By Sister Mary Ansgar, O.P. (The Bloomsbury Publishing Co.; 2s. 6d.)

A delightful little book. Pictures are half the battle in a book for children, and this book is full of pictures, well drawn, nothing vague or uncertain or niggling about them. The 'reading' too is easy 'reading' in very clear black print. One wonders a little why Sister Mary Ansgar writes of the devil, when he has to be brought in, as the 'dibble'. Perhaps she thinks the word 'dibble' will frighten children less than the word 'devil'. But children are not so silly. The child of today likes to call a spade a spade and a devil a devil, and why not? However, that is a very minor criticism. The book is a joy, and one wishes more books for children were brought out like it. It teaches holiness without talking about it.

FFLORENS ROCH.

THE CARPENTER SAINT. By Wilkinson Sherren. (Organ; 2s. 6d.)

'In writing this little work', says the author, 'I have had in mind . . . that St Joseph belonged to what we should call today the working class.' And he dedicates the book to the Young Christian Workers. The illustrations by Rosemary de Souza suggest that the

workers in mind are very young; and the style of the life, which is inevitably full of 'Mary must have been', 'likely enough Joseph', 'one naturally supposes', indicates that they are also feminine rather than masculine. But it is a simple little book which will appeal to the simple of all ages. The only criticism to be offered is against the tendency here typified of giving to the simple what they expect in art and letters instead of what they might so easily be taught to appreciate—for they still expect vision through Victorian eyes.

J.H.

MONSIEUR F. PORTAL, PRETRE DE LA MISSION. By H. Hemmer. (Bloud et Gay, Paris; 220 frs.).

The Abbé Portal is known to English Catholics chiefly through his part in the discussions on reunion which culminated in the Malines conversations. One advantage of this very full biography is that it shows us many other aspects of his zeal and apostolic charity, his seminary teaching, his formation of the young men at the Ecole Normale, his direction of souls. But his main interest was in the problem of reunion, to which he was moved by his ardent charity in the first place but also by the impression made on him at his first meeting with Lord Halifax. The delicacy of his position is admirably explained, but it does seem as if his biographer had not even to the end fully appreciated the outlook of English Catholics. There is much to be said for proceeding gently and learning to appreciate the Christian spirit of our separated brethren, but—knowing the unrepresentative character of the Anglo-Catholics and properly insisting that there is no Catholicism without the Pope—it is not surprising that Cardinal Vaughan and others should have asked first for signs of readiness to submit to Rome. Indeed the Cardinal seems to have been particularly gracious in inviting the Abbé to call on him in London, unfortunately in a letter delayed in the post until the addressee had returned to Paris; it does not seem to have occurred even to his biographer that a Catholic priest coming to a foreign country to discuss reunion with acknowledged schismatics ought himself to have made an effort to see the representatives of his own Church: 'Le peu de temps dont il disposait ne lui laissa pas le loisir de poursuivre son enquête auprès des évêques catholiques d'Angleterre' (p. 50).

On p. 193 Fr Vincent McNabb is described as 'un dominicain de Dowerside (presumably Downside).'

EDWARD QUINN